

PUERTO RICO HERALD - WASHINGTON UPDATE

Navy To Stop Cleaning Hawaii Range Land 14 Years After Training Ends... D.C. Presidential Primary For Congressional Votes Begins

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Navy To Stop Cleaning Hawaii Range Land 14 Years After Training Ends

The U.S. Navy plans to stop cleaning the land that was its Pacific equivalent of its former range on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico March 12th -- 14 years after it was forced to close the Pacific range. It will not, however, have fully cleaned-up the land, which is one of the islands of the State of Hawaii.

The history of the Kahoolawe Island range land after the training range was ordered closed provides an interesting backdrop to the fate of the land of the former Vieques range.

Forty-five square mile Kahoolawe is 6.7 miles off the coast of Maui, one of Hawaii's main islands. Once populated, it was had no residents when the Navy commandeered it in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. It became the Navy's best target range for U.S. Pacific Coast stationed forces -- what the Vieques range was to East Coast Navy and Marine Corps forces.

Vieques is a similarly sized island a similar distance from the main island of Puerto Rico. The Navy formerly owned 65% of the island, 40% used as a training range and a separate 25% for ammunition storage. Vieques was populated when the Navy began to develop the range during World War Two, acquiring most land from residents.

In 1976, Hawaiians began to break onto the Kahoolawe range to try to end the training, citing the cultural importance of the land. After 13 years of protests -- and an accident in which a bomb landed near a human being, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution calling for an end. The protests and the resolution prompted President George H. W. Bush to order an end of training in 1990.

In the case of the Vieques range, President Bill Clinton ordered an end of training in 2000 in response to a 1999 request from Puerto Rico Governor (and now gubernatorial candidate) Pedro Rossello. Widespread Puerto Rican requests for an end of training began after a worker on the range, who was a Vieques resident, was killed by an errant bomb.

The Clinton order ended much of the Vieques training but kept the range open for very

limited continued training through 2003. The key difference behind the orders was that the Navy had a small island off the coast of the State of California to shift Pacific forces training to immediately but it had no alternative to the Vieques range for Atlantic forces training.

The 2003 date for the end of all Vieques range training was picked because the Navy and Marine Corps said that an alternative could be developed by 2003. (It did, indeed, take until 2003 for the alternative to be ready. The Vieques range was closed last year on the May 1st date that Clinton ordered in an agreement with Rossello, a statehood party member and fellow Democrat.)

In 1993, a law was enacted transferring ownership of Kahoolawe to Hawaii and authorizing \$400 million for a 10-year cleanup. The key force behind the law -- and the subsequent appropriations for the cleanup -- was Senator Daniel Inouye, the top Democrat on the Senate's Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and a widely respected power in the Congress' 'Upper House.'


Clinton and Rossello agreed on legislation to transfer three-quarters of the Vieques range to Puerto Rican ownership and one-quarter to the U.S. Interior Department for limited-public access environmental protection. But the Interior and Navy Departments and Members of the Congress dropped the legislation in 2001 because of actions by Rossello's successor, Sila Calderon ("commonwealth"/no national party), that contradicted the Clinton-Rossello agreement and a federal law to implement it. The former range, consequently, was transferred to the Interior Department to be a Wilderness Area and a Wildlife Refuge.

Calderon's actions were taken in a vain effort to end the limited training before 2003. The actions included policies that did not prevent break-ins onto the range. The break-ins convinced the Navy to end all training last May 1st as Clinton and Rossello agreed even though a 2001 law enacted because of Calderon's efforts repealed the requirement for the training to end.

The Navy has cleaned-up 71% of Kahoolawe so far. In November, it transferred actual control of the island to Hawaii. Even though ownership was transferred by the 1993 law, the Navy retained control until November because of the cleanup.

Some Hawaiians are disappointed that the Navy will not have completed the cleanup by March 12th when it stops cleaning but the Navy has promised to return if more ordnance is found. It has also established a trust fund that will have between \$7 million and \$11 million to remove any further ordnance. Some activists worry that more money will be needed and the federal government may not provide it, but federal law also makes the Navy responsible for cleaning up any contamination.

The Navy plans a much more limited cleanup of the former Vieques range land. This is because federal law provides for the land to continue to be federally-owned and be a

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Wilderness Area and Wildlife Refuge in perpetuity. These statuses permit the Interior Department to ban access, so a more stringent clean-up is not needed.

The Navy's plans, however, may be affected by the designation of the land as a 'Superfund' site by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This may lead to a greater level of clean-up, although it is difficult to conceive of a clean-up that will approach the Kahoolawe effort because ownership of the Kahoolawe land was transferred to Hawaii, federal laws specifically provided \$400 million for its cleanup, and Hawaii has powerful voting representation in the Congress.